The Russian loanwords in literary Estonian
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Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1. Conclusions

Despite the 1000-year history of Estonian-Russian linguistic contact and periods of Russian hegemony and occupation there are relatively few Russian loanwords in Estonian.\textsuperscript{339} The main reason is that contact with Russian was in fact only sporadic until the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, but even when Estonia and Livonia were officially transferred to Russia in 1721 the local Baltic German nobility stayed in place and there was not much actual contact with Russians. KIPARSKY (1975, 183) says in his review of PŁOGER 1973 that many of the so-called ‘Russian’ loans in Finnish have probably been borrowed via Swedish or German, as Finnish intellectuals did not habitually read Russian. Baltic German undoubtedly also played an intermediary role in the transfer of loanwords from Russian to Estonian: many older Russian loanwords in Estonian are found in Baltic German as well and are more easily explained as loans from Baltic German instead of as loans from Russian, a fact which is often ignored (cf. HINDERLING 1981, 27-28). Russian had a stronger influence on Estonian; there was more direct contact between Russian and Estonian\textsuperscript{340} than between Russian and Finnish, so for Russian loans in Estonian the necessity of invoking an intermediary is not as strong, even though for some cases it is obvious that a Russian word was borrowed via Baltic German into Estonian. Here the lack of a comprehensive dictionary of Baltic German makes itself felt. Only in the 1880s did an intensive, state-planned, Russification start. By then, however, Estonian had already developed into a fully-fledged functional language that first looked to

\textsuperscript{339} It seems as if there are more loanwords from Old Russian in Latvian and Lithuanian, despite the fact that the Russians probably came into contact with the Baltic tribes later than with Finnic tribes. Perhaps the Baltic languages, being the closest relatives of Slavic, are structurally more receptive to loans from Russian.

\textsuperscript{340} Generations of Estonians were educated in Russian in the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. This cannot but have had an effect on the development of written Estonian at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.
German for a role model and later, after the genesis of an Estonian intelligentsia, to itself.\(^{341}\)

So by the time the contact with Russians and Russian became intensive enough for words to be borrowed in greater numbers there was no longer any urgent need to do so. During the period of Soviet occupation from 1940 to 1991\(^ {342}\) the influence of Russian was obviously strong, but again here it was mostly specific terms of Soviet realia that were borrowed.

It seems as if in the 1950s there were attempts to forcibly Russify certain words. E.g. **kirka** ‘cross-shaped tool, with a sharp (double) prong, used to break hard ground, rock, ice etc.’, a loan from Russ. кирка, exists in two variants: *kirgas* and *kirka*, where *kirgas* is an internal derivation in -s of *kirka*. VÕS 1940 and VÕS 1946 note both variants but prefer *kirgas* to *kirka*, but in the 1953 VÕS we find only the more Russian *kirka*. Was there an editorial decision or order from above to banish the Estonian derivation and leave in the form which was closer to the Russian original? In any case the 1960 ÖS refers again to *kirgas = kirka*.

Similarly **koigas ~ koik ~ koika ~ koiku** ‘bunk-bed’ is recorded in different variants in various dictionaries: *koigas* has been adapted to words in -as, *koik* has been abstracted from forms with a vowel in auslaut, *koika* is a loan from the Russian nominative form, whilst *koiku*, perhaps the most common, is borrowed from the accusative ко́йку (MUST 2000, 114). From the 1940 VÕS onwards *koiku*, most similar to the Russian, is the preferred form.

It has also been claimed (cf. 4.1. Major sources, footnote 115), however, that during the compilation of EKSS the lexicographers, most of whom studied Estonian linguistics at the University of Tartu, intentionally expurgated Russian loans from the dictionary.

The ÖS 1999, the first post-Soviet dictionary of Estonian, has already eliminated obsolescent and obsolete Russian loans; for many of the Russian loans that it has listed there are normative cross-references to genuine Estonian words, and the percentage of Russian loans has dropped from 0.66% in EKSS to 0.57% in ÖS 1999.

It is still too early to decide with certainty on the permanence of many items, but in the spoken language, especially in slang, computer jargon and in business Estonian the ascent of English as a source for new words is very clear (cf. 3.1.2. Taboo).

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\(^{341}\) Thanks to such men as O.W. Masing (1763-1832, writer, clergyman and linguist), J.H. Rosenplänter (1782-1846, editor and bibliographer), F.R. Faehlmann (1798-1850, linguist, author and physician), F.R. Kreutzwald (1803-1882, physician and compiler of the Käivipoeg, the Estonian national epic) and J. Hurt (1839-1906, linguist and folklorist).

\(^{342}\) From 1941 to 1944 Estonia was occupied by Germany.
Many of the so-called foreign words have practically the same orthography in Estonian and Finnish, but because of the position of Russian in Estonia, a country occupied by the Soviet Union for over 50 years, these words are a more integral part of the language. E.g. Russ. колхоз ‘kolkhoz’ has been borrowed into Finnish as kolhoosi and into Estonian as kolhoos, but in Finnish this remained a foreign word to denote kolkhozes in Russia, whilst in Estonia there were of course numerous kolkhozes in the country itself, and the kolkhoz was a part of daily life for many people, and therefore in dialects many variants (e.g. kolhos, kolloos, kolloos, kloos, los) have been recorded (cf. MUST 2000, 115). In turn many of the foreign words in Estonian of Russian origin are loanwords in the smaller Finnic languages spoken in Russia, such as Karelian, Veps, and Votic.

A comparison of the Russian loans in the literary language and in the dialects would be very informative. On THOMASON and KAUFMAN’s scale (cf. 3.2. The borrowing scale) the literary language remains at level 2, whilst various phenomena in the dialects belong to level 3. Thorny remains the question of loanword and foreign word. This is a problem that cannot be solved without making arbitrary decisions. Whether a word is a loanword or a foreign word depends on its adaptation to the genuine lexicon, and as this occurs in non-discrete stages differentiation remains difficult, especially as every word is easily adapted to Estonian morphology, easier than for example in Russian. Loanwords referring to Soviet realia may become foreign words again. Ideal would be a complete list of all words borrowed from Russian, but here another problem emerges: for many words of western origin it is practically impossible to prove whether they were borrowed via Russian or via German; some might have been borrowed from German, only to have been adapted later to the Russian form. A more in-depth study of this problem might throw up interesting facts.

In the word list of the present work the loanwords borrowed from Russian since the beginning of Russian-Estonian contact have been enumerated. It was thought useful to also treat cases where Russian origin remains unsure (cases which have been proven to be wrong have also been listed in an appendix; cf. 8.1. List of erroneous Russian loanwords). Many of the uncertain cases will no doubt turn out to be of some other origin, but if their

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343 Some words were recorded in the South Estonian sources of ROSSIHNUS (1632: kapsas, liud, pitsat, ravima, teng, tulp) or GUTSLAFF (1648: hurt, kaban, kalits, kari, karits, karman, korm, kust, kositama, lahits, liisik, pakal, räni, sör, tafs, timukas, vaal, vatsk and vigel) before they were recorded in any North Estonian source.

344 To the extent that it can be ‘proven’ that a certain loanword is not Russian. In many cases a persuasive case can be made for the word not being Russian, but ‘proof’ is perhaps a term not best used in etymology.
presence in this book instigates another researcher to look for a better etymology then I can only be pleased.

An interesting amendment to the well-known borrowing scale of THOMASON and KAUFMAN (1988, 74-76) is suggested by the expression *sam saks olema ‘selbst Herr sein’, recorded by WIEDEMANN (1893). Pronouns are generally not borrowed very easily, and in THOMASON and KAUFMAN’s scale this only happens from scale three onwards. Though the above expression is only recorded in this one dictionary and there is no other evidence of its use, it proves that pronouns can also be borrowed for jocular reasons.

Erroneous etymologies such as jömpsikas ‘kid’ (from Russ. ямщик according to RATSEP 1959), *kubjas ‘overseer’ (from Russ. рубя according to KALIMA 1949, 279-283; 1952, 107-109; 1956, 82-83) or kugun ‘slim’ (from Russ. скакунь according to MÄGISTE 1962, 33) have not been treated in the present work; some of these may eventually turn out to be Russian loanwords. A bare list of in my view erroneous Russian etymologies is given in 8.1.

### 6.2. Future research

Various topics suggest themselves for future research.

Some of the more problematic cases are the loans with reflexes of nasal vowels: it has long been recognized that there are loans from Old Russian with reflexes of ORuss. /lists/, but it has not yet been established whether there are loans in Finnic from Old Russian with reflexes of ORuss. /lists/. The etymologies suggested by KALIMA and SUHONEN (cf. 5.1.2.3. Nasal vowels) have not found general acceptance. Neither does e.g. SSA (II, 185b) accept that Est. mogel ‘soaplees’ has been borrowed from Pskov Russ. *myglə, but assumes that ːdl in an ORuss. *mydlovəs substituted with ːkləs in older Germanic loans. For a convincing explanation Veps mugə ‘soaplees’ also has to be taken into account.

Many words of Russian origin in common use have not yet been recorded in dictionaries or any other sources. They occur especially in the popular press and in dialects.¹⁴⁵ There are also Russian loans which occur in older literature or newspapers but which have not found their way into any dictionary; e.g. rospoka ‘kind of vehicle’, already recorded in the 1820s in MASON’S *Marahwa Näädala-Leht* (cf. KINGISEPP 1972, 98), is not recorded in any dictionary,

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¹⁴⁵ E.g. MUST 2000 is based on recorded dialect material, and so many dialect words of Russian origin in such sources as WIEDEMANN 1893, older dialect texts or the new dialect dictionary of Estonian are not treated.
but is also not found in MUST 2000.\footnote{Peege, (1966, 61) first suggested Russian origin; it is probably borrowed from Russ. роспуски ‘станок, дроги, для возки воды и вообще клади’ (DAL’ IV, 72b).} A thorough examination of literary works, newspapers, dialect sources and ethnological works would reward us with a plethora of new Russian loans. It would be also be interesting to compare the meanings of words in the various dictionaries published during the Soviet occupation. An examination of socio-political terminology shows that the meanings certain words had in the 1933 VÕS differ subtly and sometimes not so subtly from the meaning in the 1960 ÕS, where the difference is not only due to the natural development the lexicon of a language undergoes. A comparison of a selection of such words would give an insight into the methods used by the Soviet regime to educate its citizens and instil a Soviet way of thinking (a point already emphasized by the émigré linguist Jüri/George Kurman [1968, 93]).

As mentioned in 2.2.1. Non-lexical influence, there has been little research on the influence of Russian on Estonian phonology, morphology and syntax. After the Baltic states regained their independence in the early 1990s especially Latvia and Estonia were confronted with sizeable minorities of Russians in their countries. The Russian spoken by these minorities had not been influenced by the local languages to any great degree (only in the border dialects was there some influence in the lexicon). Now, however, after some ten years in countries where the connection with Russia has weakened greatly, the Russian of these minorities begins to show traces of the influence of the state languages, though still not as much as is sometimes claimed. Education in Russian, television broadcasts from Russia, the availability of Russian-language newspapers and books, and travel to Russia means that these Russian minorities do not live isolated lives. The research done so far on the Russian spoken in Estonia has not gone beyond the listing of some loans, but there now seems to be an informal network of linguists working on Baltic Russian (cf. the authors of articles in the series on ‘diapora’ Russian published by KÜLMOJA at the university of Tartu). Especially in slang and in dialects there are interesting phenomena, which deserve more attention, such as the borrowing of morphological elements and emphatic particles. There is practically no research on the influence of Russian on Estonian syntax. Neither is there any research on the numerous calques, though they are often the target of harsh comments on the pernicious influence of Russian on Estonian.

Many of these calques also have German equivalents, and in Russian itself they may be of western European origin, so research on Russian calques in Estonian cannot leave German
out of the picture, specifically also Baltic German, which in turn has been influenced by Russian. As HINDERLING does in his 1981 book on German-Estonian loanword relations, comparisons with Latvian may also be useful.